

PART A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provide a record of both the process and decision. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions.

Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality and diversity
- whether or not equality and diversity is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an Equality Analysis (Part B).

Further information is available in the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance – see page 9.

1. Title	
Title: Amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and Strategic Tenancy Policy	
Directorate: Adult Care, Housing and Public Health	Service area: Housing Options
Lead person: Sandra Wardle	Contact number: 07786335840
Is this a:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategy / Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Service / Function
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other, please specify	

2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening
<p>Revision to the Housing Allocation Policy.</p> <p>This is a screening of the use of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy had been in place since 29 October 2014. There have been various revisions to the policy and the latest was in September 2019 which embedded the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The purpose of this briefing note is to make further</p>

recommendations which aim to consider lessons learned over the past 12 months.

3. Relevance to equality and diversity

All the Council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – borough wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality and diversity.

The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are.

When considering these questions think about age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, civil partnerships and marriage, pregnancy and maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc.

Questions	Yes	No
Could the proposal have implications regarding the accessibility of services to the whole or wider community?		✓
Could the proposal affect service users?	✓	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics?		✓
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal?		✓
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		✓
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		✓

If you have answered no to all the questions above, please explain the reason

If you have answered **no** to all the questions above please complete **sections 5 and 6**.

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above please complete **section 4**.

4. Considering the impact on equality and diversity

If you have not already done so, the impact on equality and diversity should be

considered within your proposals before decisions are made.

Considering equality and diversity will help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and take active steps to create a discrimination free society by meeting a group or individual's needs and encouraging participation.

Please provide specific details for all three areas below using the prompts for guidance and complete an Equality Analysis (Part B).

• **How have you considered equality and diversity?**

The Council is required to allocate Social Housing according to a published Allocations Policy which has been drawn up according to the Housing Act 1996, Part VI and Part VII as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Localism Act 2011. The Council's Allocation Policy focuses on helping people in greatest housing need to gain access to suitable and appropriate accommodation.

The Housing Act, 1996, the Homeless Act 2002, Localism Act and Homeless Reduction Act 2018 require that reasonable preference be given to:

- people who are homeless (within the meaning of Housing Act 1996 Part VII).
- people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3).
- people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including any grounds relating to a disability)
- people who need to move to a locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

In addition, Rotherham's Allocation Policy gives preference to:

- Customers unable to return home from hospital, as their current property does not meet their medical needs and temporary accommodation would be inappropriate or they require immediate rehousing preventing an admission to hospital or institution.
- Ex Service Personnel and their families who are leaving the Armed Forces and Former Members of the Reserve Forces (or who have left in the past 5 years) and have no accommodation to return to.
- Customers leaving temporary or supported accommodation schemes
- Households that are subject to adult or child safeguarding issues
- Households who need to move to an area in the district to avoid hardship to themselves or others. This includes those who give or receive care or need to access specialist treatment. In these circumstances an established medical need must be demonstrated such as mental illness or disorder, physical or learning disability, or progressive medical condition.
- RSL and Council Tenants that wish to move to a smaller property that they are under occupying

There are 15 proposed revisions to the Allocation Policy. Benchmarking has been undertaken within the Subregion. The proposed amendments will ensure that the policy is brought in line with the subregion, assists with homelessness assessments, it meets changing demand and that households are considered for the most appropriate type of property.

Extensive consultation has been held with partners including Shiloh, Crisis UK and will also take place with Rotherham Federation, the Quality Standards and Challenge Group and at the Strategic Housing Forum with Housing providers.

It is recognised that elected members will want to engage in the way properties are allocated therefore any changes have been considered by Improving Places Select Commission Working review group on 8 January 2021. OSMB will formally receive the report on 10 February 2021.

If the proposals are agreed, the Housing Allocation Policy and Summary Guide will be updated to reflect the changes.

If the recommendations are approved, existing tenants will also be informed of the policy changes through articles published in “Home Matters” which is the Council’s Tenants’ Newsletter.

Timeline of consultation:

Stakeholders	Date
Providers /Service Users	2 meetings held in July 2020
Quality Standards and Challenge Group	23 September 2020
Officers	September/October 2020
Rotherham Federation	28 September 2020
Applicants and Tenants	October and November 2020
Strategic Housing Forum - providers	1 December 2020
Improving Places Review Group	8 January 2021
Cabinet	15 February 2021

If the proposed recommendations are approved the policy will be adopted 28 days from the date of approval. The changes will be communicated to customers via an easy read version of the Policy. The Council’s Housing Allocation Policy will also be formally amended to reflect the changes and the new version published on the website.

- **Key findings**

Rotherham MBC has a responsibility to serve the needs and promote the interests of all who live or work in the Borough, or who use its services. The Council’s Corporate Equalities Strategy works towards developing services, facilities and working practices, which are equally accessible to and appropriate for all its customers, irrespective of their

gender, age, race, sexuality, disability, or income.

The Allocation Policy is intended to improve community cohesion and will increase opportunities for applicants to move between neighbourhoods and communities.

The proposed revisions positively impact those most with a housing need including children, care leavers and homeless households. I have detailed some of the proposed revisions to demonstrate how the revisions will benefit the residents of Rotherham with a housing need.

Changes to ensure that children are considered for appropriate homes.

- The current policy states that in respect of relationship breakdown, where there is an agreement for shared care (50/50), both applicants would be excluded from accessing houses and would be eligible for flats only, meaning that children in those circumstances are missing out on enjoying outdoor space within each parental home. The recommendation is that where care is 50/50 both parent or carers would be entitled to houses.
- Families with children under the age of 12 who live in an upper floor flat are eligible for Band 3, this is an enhancement from the Transfer Band. The recommendation is to remove the age limit and state a dependent child under the age of 21 is eligible to live in flats with the tenant, which aligns with Children's and Young people's Care arrangement age.

Changes to ensure local homeless people are given greater preference

- Homeless households are exempt from the Local Connection criteria. This means that local people who become homeless are receiving the same priority Band 1 and 2 as applicants whose last settled address was outside of the Borough. The recommendation is to award less priority (Band 4) to homeless applicants with no local connection (Existing applications will retain their banding). This is also inline sub regionally.

Changes to reduce the number of categories in Band 1

- Benchmarking has been completed with other local authorities sub regionally. Rotherham currently has 17 Band 1 categories. This is more than double other LA's. In reducing this number, it will give priority to those most in housing need. The recommendations will reduce the Band 1 categories to 6 which would be more in line with the Council's neighbouring towns.

Changes to amend time limits

- Where applicants are placed in supported accommodation, current policy awards a Band 2 status, Band 1 can be applied after 6 months. The recommendation is that those in supported accommodation be awarded a Band 1 status when deemed ready to live independently, irrespective of time. Not only does this free up supported and temporary accommodation when not required, it also provides applicants with move on options to secure permanent accommodation.
- Our current policy awards Band 2 for Looked after Children who are ready to live independently. The Leaving Care Team faces similar pressures for

accommodation placements. Where a young person is placed out of the authority and ready to live independently this has a significant impact on the cost to the Council and of equal importance to the cost is the family and community connections for the young person. Having to wait for the 6 monthly threshold creates blockages in supported and temporary accommodation and budget pressures for Children and Young People' Services.

- Band 1 status is time limited to 28 days. This time limit is not realistic as properties do not usually become available within this very short period. The limit causes anxiety to applicants when they receive their Band 1 award letter. Often applicants will contact the team for reassurance that they will not lose their band one status if they are not re-housed within 28 days. Barnsley have a timescale of 3 months and the proposal is to adopt this approach. The Housing Advice Team will then conduct a review of Band 1 awards every 3 months, which reduces anxiety and reduces administration of the Housing Register.

Changes to stop repeat homelessness

- Transitioning from life on the streets into accommodation often results in failure. Many homeless people can find themselves in a never-ending cycle of repeat homelessness. The Allocation Policy criteria can exclude applicants from joining the housing register (e.g. previous evictions, rent arrears over £800). The proposal is for applicants who engage and meet a set criterion to be considered by Housing Assessment Panel for a 2nd chance to re-join the housing register.

Changes to assist with homelessness assessments

- The current policy awards Band 1 for applications owed a Main Duty and Relief Duty (assessed as priority need). The proposed revision is to place Relief Duty into a Band 2 category. In moving Relief Duty to Band 2, this will give the Homelessness Team time to work with the applicant to consider all housing options. A decision can also be made regarding intentionality at the end of the relief duty. This recommendation will also place Rotherham inline with other local authorities subrationally.

• Actions

- Extensive consultation has been undertaken, and meetings have already been held with partners including Shiloh, Crisis UK, Rotherham Federation, the Quality Standards and Challenge Group and at the Strategic Housing Forum with Housing providers.
- Review this equalities analysis annually

Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	2/10/2020
Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	24/12/2020
Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Sandra Wardle Housing Advice & Assessment Manager

5. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening:

Name	Job title	Date
Sandra Tolley	Head of Housing Options	11/1/2021

6. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this screening relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy of **all** screenings should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.

Date screening completed	11/1/2021
Report title and date	Revisions to the Housing Allocation Policy
If relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision – report date and date sent for publication	15 February 2021
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	